Thomas R. Schreiner
Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter
Nashville, Tennessee, USA, B&H Publishing Group, 2018, 150.

I still cherish the airplane ride, when I had the privilege to sit with Dr. Schreiner, a professor of New Testament interpretation and of biblical theology at The Southern Theological Seminary, after both inspiring and eye-opening lectures in biblical theology he taught at European Biblical and Theological Center in Berlin. Instead of shutting himself off after a long week of teaching or lecturing some more on Pauline theology, this humble theological giant was asking me, a young student and minister, many questions about my family, ministry, and country of Croatia. Throughout the week he displayed this attitude of listening to understand other points of view, and it is programmatic of his attitude in theology in general, and of this book on a controversial topic.

As a convinced cessationist, Schreiner is open about the fact that he has gained many insights from continuationist theologians like Grudem, Piper, and Storms (to whom he has dedicated the book), as well as from other continuationist friends and even students (6). We can sense his irenic spirit as he confesses how "wearisome and tiring it is to engage in arguments, especially with those whom we love and cherish," and concludes that what "we need instead is loving and charitable discussion" (8). Therefore, his primary goal is not to defend cessationism or refute continuationism, but more importantly to "sketch in a theology of spiritual gifts" (7).

In the first chapter, Schreiner utilizes some helpful insights of J. I. Packer about the "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Charismatic Movement." He notices, for example, that we may learn from Charismatics how to put a greater emphasis on spirit-filled living, expressing emotions (11), how to be inspired by their prayerfulness, and other such matters. He does not shy away from mentioning weaknesses such as the temptations that are inherent to the movement toward elitism, sectarianism, anti-intellectualism, and so on.

Chapter two defines the spiritual gifts as "gifts of grace granted by the Holy Spirit which are designed for the edification of the church" (17). He provides the list of all the gifts mentioned in the Bible, and is reluctant to speculating about those not mentioned in the Bible (19). Then he studies and defines each of these gifts, dividing them into two groups: gifts of speaking and gifts of service (27).

Chapters three and four are the pastoral center of the work. Both contain five truths about spiritual gifts each. First, he stresses that Christ is the Lord under whom we serve with our gifts, thus stressing not their effects or effectiveness but

our devotion and obedience to him, the giver of the gifts. Christ's sovereignty is evident even in the possibility that Schreiner grants, as a cessationist, that "miracles, healings, and signs and wonders" are possible in some extraordinary missionary situations (30), even though we should not expect these things to happen as a rule. Also, Schreiner wants us to understand that even though we have the gift, our effectiveness does not come from ourselves but from God. He concludes, "God in his mercy will not let us feel too greatly the effectiveness of our gifts so that we don't grow proud. He lets us feel weakness so that his strength shines through us" (31). Second, we need to think reasonably about our gifts, avoiding temptation to compare ourselves with others or try "to become what we are not" (32). He warns that having the joy in the Lord does not necessarily mean that we are called to professional ministry, and that the church needs enthusiastic believers in all walks of life. Indeed, a "realistic assessment of our lives and our talents and gifts brings great contentment about our place in life if we rest in God. How many live in unhappiness because they aren't content with what God has given them?" (33) Thirdly, he notes, that God gives diversity in results of the gifts and, fourthly, that our gifts do not make us inferior or superior to others in the Body. "The contribution of every member of the body matters", notes Schreiner, and encourages believers not to put themselves down for not having more spectacular gifts (37). The fifth truth reiterates that our gifts are not the measure of our own spirituality but of Spirit's sovereignty in giving them. Therefore, "we can't take credit for the gifts we have or worry about gifts we don't possess" (42).

Next, he writes that the gifts were given to edify the church, that is, to equip believers for ministry to build up the body of Christ. The main motivation in exercising the gifts should be love (45), as the gifts are "cruciform, for as we exercise the gifts, we give ourselves for the sake of others, just as Christ did on the cross" (46). Therefore, the main question one has should not be how can others love and serve me, but how can I love and reach out to them (47). In his seventh truth, Schreiner explains that we were baptized by the Spirit when we believed in Christ, thus rejecting it as a second blessing experience. That this is so is evident, among other texts, in Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul makes belonging to Christ equal to having the Spirit (49). He explains passages in Acts that appear to teach otherwise as belonging to a special soteriological season burdened with religious and cultural reasons. These needed to be resolved before baptism in the Spirit could become the norm for these particular groups. For example, Samaritans needed to be included into the apostolic church and not be left alone to make another separated group. Eight, Schreiner underlines that edification comes through teaching and understanding, illustrating it through Paul's desire in 1 Corinthians 14 to rather speak a few understandable words than many words in an unknown tongue, as we are "transformed by the renewal of our

minds" (60). In his ninth truth, we find a counsel to "concentrate on our gifts", as we read in Romans 12:6-8 that we should utilize the gifts Christ gave us. This does not mean that we should not serve in other ways, of course. Nevertheless, gifts that the Lord has given us should be exercised with "the right attitude and the right spirit" (63). Finally, author points out that gifts are worthless without love, as love "represents the character of God himself, and love is superior to all the gifts." Indeed, it is the true test of Christian maturity (71).

Chapter five answers several questions Schreiner anticipates. One is, "Does Every Christian Have a Spiritual Gift?" to which he gives a positive answer. In his answer to the question "How do we discover our spiritual gift(s)?" the author discourages us from taking introspective tests, as the purpose of the gift is not self-growth but serving with it. Indeed, you "are exercising your gifts even if you don't know what they are, and that is the most important thing of all" (74). As to "why does Paul say to desire greater gifts if the gifts we have don't signify either inferiority or superiority," Schreiner writes that even though some gifts are more beneficial for the Body of Christ, we should not take from it that "persons with such gifts have more value" (75). Also, even though we are told that God gives gifts sovereignly, we should not understand this fatalistically as if we should not desire and seek them. Fifth, Schreiner says that dichotomy between natural and supernatural gifts is "flawed" since all gifts are supernatural as they come from God. There are, indeed, more miraculous gifts and those "stitched into one's personality", but "the supernatural character of the gift is not thereby denied, for even in this case the gift comes from God" (79). Answering the question "are the gifts permanent possessions, or can we exercise a gift that isn't normally ours?", he writes that it seems like the gifts are permanent, but that it is also possible that some people exercise a gift only occasionally. There are also differences between gifts and offices, although we should not understand an "office" too rigidly as an appointed officer in the church (80).

In the next several chapters, Schreiner deals with two much debated gifts, that of prophecy and that of tongues. Chapter six defines prophecy first by distinguishing it from preaching, which relies on Scripture, and then positively as communicating direct and spontaneous revelation from God (84). He points to a descriptive text in 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 as to the nature of prophecy, as well as to the illustration of prophecy in Acts 11:27-28, for predictive prophecy, and in Acts 13:1-3, for prescriptive prophecy. Chapter seven debates whether prophecy in the New Testament was fallible or infallible. After reviewing some of the reasons why theologians like Wayne Grudem hold to this view, Schreiner expounds his view that "New Testament prophecy doesn't differ from Old Testament prophecy, and like Old Testament prophecy, it is infallible and always true" (89). He gives different reasons why he believes there is an inherent continuity between

prophets in the OT and those in the NT, and then he shows that even the factually contested Agabus prophecy was infallibly fulfilled (97), when we take into consideration the symbolic nature of his prophecy (98). The author further explains that what some people today call prophecies should be termed as "impressions," as God is able to lead us to minister to someone with words that are not prophetic but are nevertheless impressed "on a person's heart and mind" by God (99). Indeed, Schreiner (100) writes,

> The difference between cessationists and continuationists is in some ways insignificant at the practical level when it comes to prophecy, for what continuationists call prophecy, cessationists call impressions. As a cessationist, I affirm that God may speak to his people through impressions. And there are occasions where impressions are startlingly accurate.

It is important, he writes, to differentiate between those two, as we are commanded to obey prophecies, but no such thing was commanded with regards to impressions (101).

Chapter eight addresses the gift of tongues. Schreiner believes that "the gift of tongues is the gift of speaking in human languages" (104), which he shows from Acts and 1 Corinthians. With regards to present charismatic tongue-speaking phenomena, Schreiner believes that "since people are not speaking in discernable languages," the "contemporary 'gift' doesn't match what is in the Scriptures." He does not attribute it to the demonic, nevertheless, and he respectfully agrees with Packer that most of it is "a form of psychological relaxation" (110). Chapter nine assesses the significance of the gift of tongues. Schreiner points out that tongues in Acts 2 serve as a counter to the incident at the Tower of Babel, as its reversal and the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, whereas in Acts 10 it serves to confirm the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God (113). With the disciples of John in Acts 19, its purpose is to confirm Jesus' supremacy over John (115). In 1 Corinthians 14, tongues are pitted against prophecy in its usefulness not because of its unusefulness, but because Corinthians were so enamored with them. Also, tongues can be edifying only through the use of an interpreter, and are useless to Christ's Body without one. Indeed, they can even bring about judgment to unbelievers because they will judge believers speaking in tongues without interpretation as infantile fanatics (120). Therefore, Paul set up some rules about the use of tongues, most important one that without the interpreter those who speak in tongues should remind silent. Paul does permit private speaking in tongues, as he himself utilized the gift in this way, nevertheless, "private tongue-speaking obviously is not necessary for spiritual growth and sanctification! We know this because not all believers speak in tongues, nor should they (1 Cor. 12:30)" (122).

Last two chapters are devoted to the argument for cessationism. Schreiner first mentions some unconvincing arguments for the view, in chapter ten. The

"perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13 is not "the Bible or spiritual maturity" (124), but the second coming (125). This is how the Corinthians would understand Paul (127), as there is a clear parallelism between "the perfect" and the "face to face," which echoes theophanies in the OT (128). Schreiner acknowledges that this is, in effect, one of the best scriptural arguments for continuation, but he nevertheless believes cessationism is true because of the reasons he gives in the following, final chapter of the book. Chapter eleven thus develops an argument for cessationism. First, even though the perfection in 1 Corinthians 13 is second coming, it is doubtful that it is required that all gifts continue until Christ's return. He argues that Paul did not know that history will last for at least two thousand years, and that the Lord "didn't reveal clearly to Paul that the gifts would end because he didn't want the Corinthians or Paul to know the day of his coming" (130). Otherwise Corinthians would know that Christ is not coming back in their lifetime if they knew some gifts would slowly cease. In other words, "though 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 tells us the gifts will end when Christ returns, it doesn't require that all the gifts last until Jesus returns." Furthermore, Schreiner writes that the "basis for cessationism is the claim that the church was 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (Eph. 2:20)" (132). Many continuationists are cessationists with regards to the apostles, as they believe that the foundation of the church was laid by them, and therefore their role is no longer required. Today, "apostolic authority is enshrined in the Scriptures" (133). This is his main argument with regards both the apostles and the prophets, who, as he showed earlier, were endued with the same authority and infallibility like the OT prophets. He does allow for the gift of prophecy to have been active in the first few centuries of the church until it has agreed upon the canon of Scripture. This means that the "gift slowly and gradually faded away." He calls his view "nuanced cessationism," because he does not say that all the gifts "have *necessarily* passed away" (135). Even though he does believe they have ceased, he does not think this question is as important with regards to other gifts (136). Nevertheless, if interpreted tongues are effectually prophecy (cf. 1. Cor 14:5; Acts 2:17-18), then it means that they have also ceased. Notwithstanding, the "role of tongues isn't as important if there are no claims to new revelation." The same can be said of miracles and healings. Since today's healings are not on the same level as those in the NT but are quite subjective, he does not think people today have the gift of healing. This does not mean, he adds, that there are no healings or miracles today (137). He even prays for healings, but today God does not perform miracles through healers and does not do it as something normal and normative (138). Indeed, even charismatics agree that gifts do not operate at the same level of effectiveness as in the NT. The reason for the miracles in the NT was to authenticate God's revelation, and its ultimate revelation is "the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ"

(139). They also serve to encourage believers, and as "an anticipation of the new creation that is coming!" Nevertheless, now that we have the Bible, those miracles are no longer needed, and therefore are not common (140). Final argument that Schreiner gives points out that all the great reformers in the past were cessationists, adhering to a similar theology that he holds. Although he admits that they could have been wrong since they are fallible, "we should not be quick to depart from their perspective" (140).

In his epilogue, Schreiner reiterates that spiritual gifts are "not a first-order matter." Evangelical Christians should learn to speak about these issues with love, "in ways that are charitable and kind" (142). Therefore, he decided to "end this book by saying, 'If I have the right view of spiritual gifts, but I don't have love, then I am nothing.'" The book thus ends on a similar note as it begins, and even as it consistently works through on its pages.

This is a pastoral book about gifts, and not an academic treatise. It teaches us not only its topic but also how to think through contestable issues with brothers and sisters who disagree with us. Its relative shortness and simplicity, as well as "Discussion Questions," show that it is available for both individual and group study. There are, of course, exegetically and theologically, more technical books about spiritual gifts from both camps. After reading this book, I would recommend it as a primer that helps us to understand both the contours of the debate and the way we are called to argue with love. Indeed, if Augustine said "I believe in so that I may understand," this book shows us that we need to love so that we might debate.

Miroslav Balint-Feudvarski

John H. Walton

Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief

Downers Grove, Illinois, USA, IVP Academic, 2017, 306.

To this day, the Old Testament is still misinterpreted and often misused or even considered obsolete by many Christians, concedes Walton, thus the key aim of the textbook is to change those notions. The book intends to aid churches in a better understanding and to strengthen the believer's faith (14) as he tries to "build a bridge between academy and the church" (26). Walton's approach is quite different; it is not a reiterate of others; because of that, it will alter some of the readers' "old" views and perspectives of the Old Testament stories.

Walton provides us with insight into his views and understanding of the Old Testament theology, taking into account the importance of in-depth reading,